

MYTH vs. REALITY

Top 10 myths about underage drinking



Prepared February 2006 for the Maine Office of Substance Abuse by MESAP: Maine's Environmental Substance Abuse Prevention Center, a project of Medical Care Development, Inc. (207) 773-7737;
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TOP 10 MYTHS ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING

#10 "At least alcohol is safer than other drugs."

REALITY CHECK:

Alcohol kills 6.5 times more youth than all other illegal drugs combined.

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REALITY CHECK: Scare tactics don't work, at least not for most people. That's because we all have a natural tendency to think, "That won't happen to me."

- Research suggests that using scare tactics can actually do more harm than good, because they can unintentionally normalize or glamorize the risky behavior.
- Well-designed and research-based education programs are a solid foundation for prevention efforts but are not enough on their own

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– It's a rite of passage."**

REALITY CHECK: Contrary to popular belief, most kids aren't out drinking every weekend.

- In Maine, anonymous student surveys show that the majority of teens--including 60% of 10th graders and 51% of 12th graders—have *not* consumed alcohol during the past 30 days.
- Research shows that misperceptions that “everybody’s doing it” can actually make young people more likely to drink alcohol.
- However, those who are current drinkers tend to drink heavily and frequently, making them seem more visible than the “silent majority”

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REALITY CHECK: Providing youth with positive & fun activities can be an important part of a community's strategy to prevent underage drinking—but it's not a cure-all.

- Research shows that positive involvement in community serves as a strong protective factor against substance abuse. But this does not necessarily mean “having more stuff to do.”
- Data shows that kids in urban areas drink just as much as kids in rural areas. Even in the most remote and isolated communities, there are many kids who don't drink at all.

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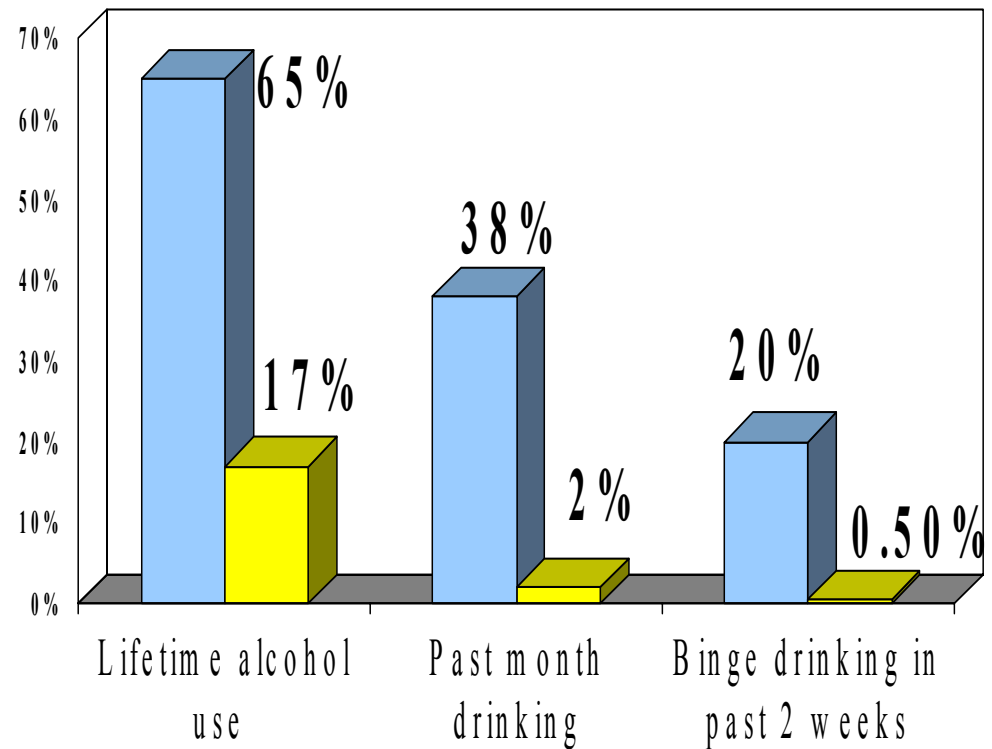
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#6 "My child and I have a good relationship. He/she isn't drinking, I would know."

REALITY CHECK: Survey results show that Maine parents vastly underestimate the likelihood that their own child is drinking

- They also tend to overestimate how likely it is they would catch their child for drinking, compared to how likely teens say it is their parents would catch them



For more info:
www.maineparents.net

■ Teens who reported this behavior
■ Parents who reported that their teen engaged in this behavior

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REALITY CHECK: The adolescent brain is still developing—especially the part of the brain that deals with decision-making.

- Drinking before the age of 21 places kids at higher risk for academic failure, depression, suicide, and sexual assault.
- Young people who begin drinking before age 17 are twice as likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21. Those who begin by age 15 are more than four times more likely to develop dependence.

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REALITY CHECK: Even though we tend to think of young people as naturally rebellious, research shows that the great majority of kids respond best to clear rules—both from their parents and society at large:

- For example, studies show that underage youth are significantly less likely to drink alcohol when they believe they will be caught by police.
- Youth are even less likely to drink alcohol when they believe their parents think it would be “very wrong” for them to do so.

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#3 "If we changed the minimum drinking age back to 18 instead of 21, it would reduce problems with underage drinking."

REALITY CHECK: Researchers consider the 21 year-old drinking age to be one of the most successful public safety & public health policies in United States history.

- Since the minimum drinking age was changed to 21 in the 1980s, deaths from drinking and driving accidents have decreased by thousands, saving an estimated 20,000 lives.

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#2 "In Europe, youth drink more responsibly than in the US."

REALITY CHECK: According to data collected from 15- and 16-year-olds in 35 European countries, European kids actually drink more often, drink more heavily and get drunk more often than American teens.

- Only in Turkey are teen drinking rates lower than in the U.S.

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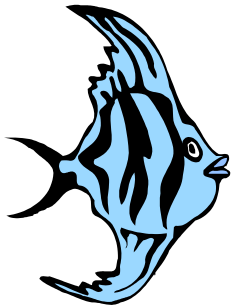
#2 "In Europe, youth drink more responsibly than in the US."

#1 "It's okay as long as they don't drive."

REALITY CHECK: Only one-third of underage drinking deaths involve auto crashes.

- The remaining two-thirds involve alcohol poisoning, homicides, suicides, and unintentional injuries such as burns, drowning, and falls.
- Taking away the car keys does nothing to prevent all the other damage that can result from underage drinking. And youth have pointed out that they see a mixed message when parents are willing to host an underage drinking party as long as nobody's driving.

WE NEED NEW SOLUTIONS:



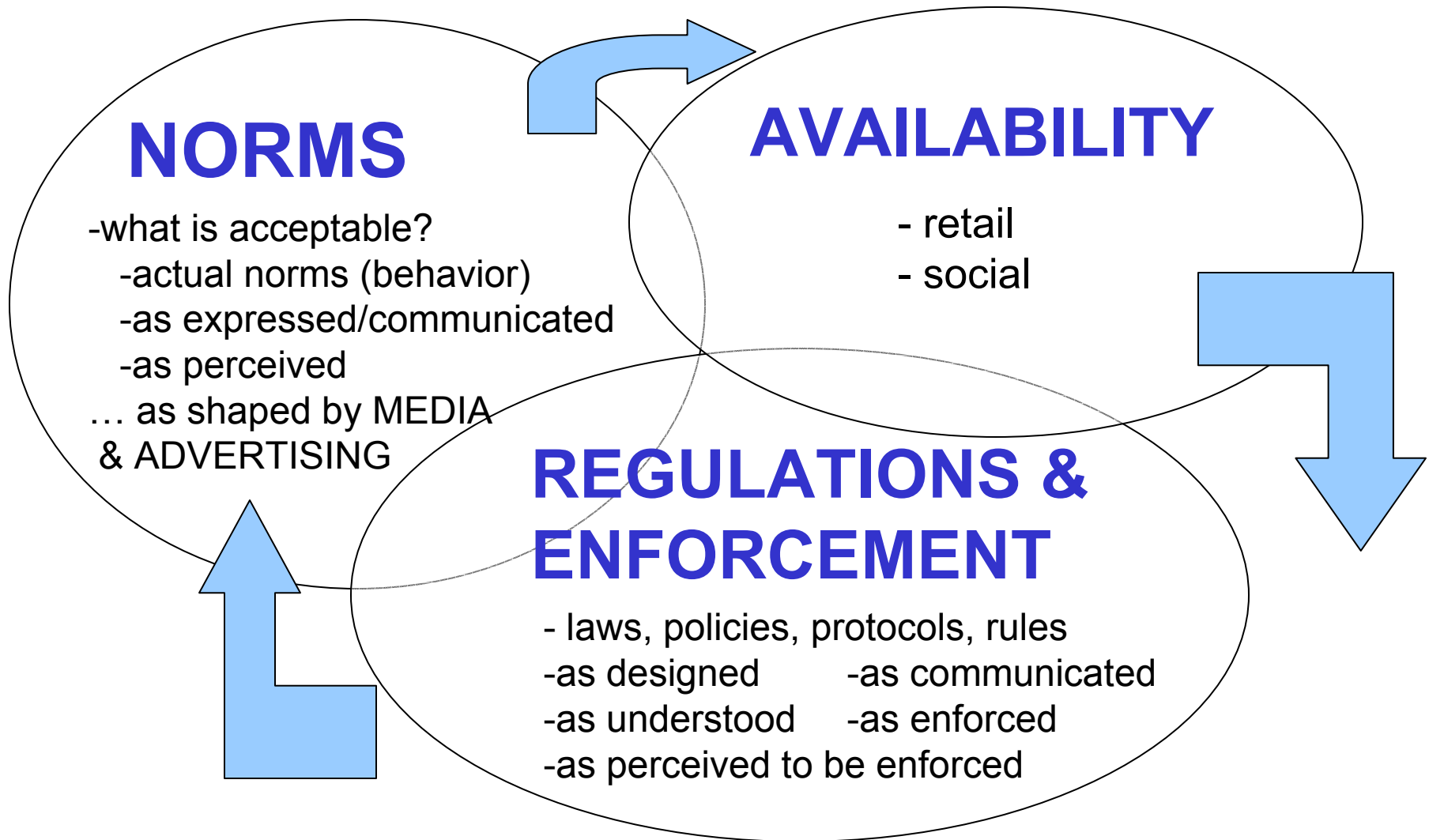
“Holding youth solely responsible for underage drinking is like blaming fish for dying in a polluted stream.” —Laurie Lieber, Marin Institute



**So, what's in
the water?**

(and how is it getting it
there?!)

What shapes the alcohol environment?





...So, what
can we DO
about it?

BRAINSTORM Part 1:

Where are the opportunities for change in our local environment?

- 1. Norms** (including media & advertising)
- 2. Availability** (social + retail)
- 3. Regulations**
- 4. Enforcement**

BRAINSTORM Part 2:

What are some STRATEGIES for changing our local environment?

- 1. Norms** (including media & advertising)
- 2. Availability** (social + retail)
- 3. Regulations**
- 4. Enforcement**

Part 3:

**What are our
PRIORITIES for
action?**

Part 4:

Next Steps